



HEALTH PROFILE: LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

HIV/AIDS

Estimated Number of Adults and Children Living with HIV/AIDS (end 2003)	1,700
Total Population (2004)	5.787 million
Adult HIV Prevalence (end 2003)	0.1%
HIV-I Seroprevalence in Urban Areas	
Population most at risk (i.e., sex workers and clients, patients seeking treatment for sexually transmitted infections, or others with known risk factors)	1.1%
Population least at risk (i.e., pregnant women, blood donors, or others with no known risk factors)	0.4%

Sources: UNAIDS, U.S. Census Bureau

HIV prevalence is thought to be low in Laos, officially known as Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR). Approximately 1,700 adults are thought to be living with HIV/AIDS; 170 new infections were reported in 2003, the last year for which data were available.

HIV Surveillance undertaken in November 2004 indicates low HIV prevalence. This does not however necessarily indicate low risk. A prevalence survey of sexually transmitted infections undertaken at the same time showed that chlamydia and gonorrhea rates among service women in the capital city, Vientiane, were 45%; in the border province of Bokeo, 43.6%; and in the southern province of Champasak, 27.9%. Another risk factor comes from Lao PDR's geographical location. Neighboring provinces of China and parts of Vietnam are reporting significant rates of HIV infection, and cross-border migration to neighboring countries means the HIV epidemic will continue to spread in Laos if appropriate interventions are not established. Socioeconomic changes are occurring rapidly in Laos, including international tourism, which is leading to sexual behaviors that may place some Laotians at increased risk for HIV infection.

NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Government of the Lao PDR began grappling with a potential HIV/AIDS epidemic in 1992 when participants at an AIDS conference agreed that the spread of HIV was inevitable and would likely occur via young men who sought work in nearby countries, or who migrated to larger communities and then returned to their villages, and via women who become commercial sex workers out of economic necessity.

The National Committee for the Control of AIDS is in charge of policy matters related to HIV/AIDS prevention and control in Laos. The committee consists of 14 members from 12 government ministries. The National Action Plan on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases for the 2002–2005 period has a strong focus on prevention and advocacy. By the end of 2003, Laos had raised \$11 million in international funding to implement its action plan.

Nongovernmental organizations play a lead role in implementing HIV/AIDS prevention and care interventions. A Lao network of people living with HIV/AIDS, LNP+, has been established, and care and support services for people living with HIV/AIDS have been initiated in one province and are being expanded to four others.

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PSI manages a behavior change communication strategy that includes both mass media and interpersonal channels. Television, radio, and printed media offer health information, whereas interpersonal communications include informational sessions with sex workers, barbers, and hairdressers.

FHI's work in Laos includes the development of a core group of skilled researchers and program managers at both the national and provincial levels who can manage behavioral change communication efforts, oversee management and treatment services for sexually transmitted infections, provide better and more extensive training for pharmacists and laboratory workers, manage surveillance and research ethics, and conduct qualitative methodological and analytical data reviews. FHI also focuses on prevention of sexually transmitted infections and care provision with service women through a network of outreach workers and eight wellness centers in four provinces.

IMPORTANT LINKS AND CONTACTS

U.S. Embassy, P.O. Box 114, Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic
Tel: 856-21-21-2581, Fax: 856-21-21-2584

Website: <http://usembassy.state.gov/laos/>

USAID HIV/AIDS Website for Lao PDR:
http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/Countries/ane/laos.html

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For more information, see http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/

USAID SUPPORT

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) does not provide direct assistance to Lao PDR for health activities, although the United States has worked with the Lao government since 1998 to monitor the HIV/AIDS epidemic through a regional project that encompasses the Mekong River delta area. Greater levels of funding in recent years have enabled USAID to expand activities that include improving market research and strategies for condom sales, prevention and treatment programs for sexually transmitted infections, and surveillance and interventions for populations at risk for HIV infection. USAID's HIV/AIDS activities in Laos are managed primarily by Population Services International (PSI) and Family Health International (FHI).

A primary objective of USAID assistance being managed by PSI is the distribution of affordable condoms with instructional inserts in the Lao language. A distribution survey in 2002 indicated that PSI had achieved a 98% coverage rate in pharmacies. The project also establishes nontraditional points of sale frequented by high-risk groups and links these with commercial distribution networks.